(b) if so, the areas declared as drought hit in Kachh Saurashtra region;

(c) the number of talukas so far covered under the DPAR and the number proposed to be covered during 1996-97; and

(d) the nature of assistance given so far or porposed to be given by the Government to mitigate the sufferings of the people?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA): (a) and (b) According to the infomration received from the Government of Gujarat, the State Government had declared 625 villages in 12 Talukas affected by scarcity and 3365 villages in 61 Talukas affected by semi-scarcity conditions in the Kachh-Saurashtra region, due to inadequate rains during last year. However, it is reported that rains have now been received in these areas.

(c) 52 Blocks in 10 districts of Gujarat are covered under the Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP). From 1995-96, area development under DPAP has been taken up on watershed basis. 469 watershed projects are to be completed upto 1998-99 under the Programme. The Central Government has allocated Rs. 1,545 lakhs for this Programme in 1996-97.

(d) Government of India have released two instalments of Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) for 1996-97 amounting to Rs. 52.35 crores to enable the State Government to undertake necessary relief measures in the affected areas.

Rise in the Prices of Agricultural Inputs

640. SHRI IQBAL SINGH : Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the percentage of rise in prices of agricultural inputs during the year 1995-96;

(b) the percentage of rise in the support price of foodgrains during this period;

(c) the percentage of rise in the production of these foodgrains during this period; and

(d) the steps being taken by Government to control the price-rise in the agricultural inputs?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI CHATURANAN MISHRA): (a) The rise in the prices of agricultural inputs during the year 1995-96 has been provisionally estimated as 4.0%.

(b) The Minimum support prices of foodgrains during 1995-96 have been raised by 6.1%.

(c) The production of foodgrains during 1995-96 is likely to show a marginal decline of 0.4% over the previous year.

(d) The Government has been controlling the prices of certain agricultural inputs falling under the administered price regime like some of the fertilizers, canal irrigation, electricity, diesel and other petroleum products. The Government has also been taking steps to supply, at reasonable prices, some of the other inputs like certified seeds, plant protection chemicals and agricultural implements & machinery. The Government has recently enhanced the rates of concession on phosphatic and potassic fertilizers.

Direct Train from Delhi to Kotdwara

641. SHRI RAJ NATH SINGH:
SHRIMATI MALTI SHARMA:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any action on the proposal submitted by the Members of Parliament recently for introduction of direct train service for the people of hill districts of U.P. from Delhi to Kotdwara;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) by when the said places would be connected by direct train service; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) to (d) Direct travel facility between Delhi and Kotdwara is already available in the form of 5 (five) through coaches (1 Sleeper, 3 Unreserved IInd Class and 1 First-cum-Second class) running by 4041/4042 Mussorie Express and 1KN/8KN Passengers with detaching/attaching of coaches at Najibabad. The Railways are examining the feasibility of reducing the lieover period of coaches at Najibabad by changing the timings of the connecting Kotdwara-Najibabad passengers.